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ABSTRACT

A 16-week office specialist certificate program was developed for Spanish-speaking adults who have the ability and desire to obtain an entry-level office administration position but who have limited English proficiency and basic occupational skills. The program, which is based on the vocational bilingual training model, takes advantage of the native language skills students bring with them to the program and builds on those skills while developing their English language and vocational skills. The program model includes four basic courses: office administration, keyboarding, key calculator math, and bilingual business writing. Each course includes 80 hours of instruction to be delivered over 5 days per week. The course was developed based on input from an advisory board and the results of a needs assessment distributed to employment agencies, bilingual translation services, and corporate human services personnel. All courses use computer-aided instruction, incorporate Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills skills and competencies, and are taught in a self-paced learning center through a combination of instructor-directed lessons and student-selected work. The program's effectiveness is currently being determined through a formative evaluation and will eventually be assessed through a summative evaluation. (Contains 14 references.) (MN)

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VOCATIONAL BILINGUAL TRAINING MODEL FOR OFFICE SPECIALIST

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PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Traditionally, limited English proficient (LEP) adults have been excluded from job training programs until they attained proficiency in English. However, experience has shown LEP students can complete job training just as successfully and in the same amount of time as their English-speaking peers when the Vocational Bilingual Training (VBT) model is used. VBT teaches both the job skills and the English language skills needed for satisfactory performance in work environments.

A 16 week Office Specialist Certificate Program, funded through a Carl D. Perkins, Category 1400/Curriculum grant, has been designed for English/Spanish speaking students who have the ability and desire to obtain an entry-level office administration position, but are deficient in English language and basic occupational skills. It takes advantage of the native language skills students bring with them to the program and builds upon this at the same time as English language and vocational skills are developed. The result is a bilingual entry-level office specialist who is able to facilitate and provide the communications needed for the successful conclusion of bilingual business dealings.

The North Harris College Adult Education Program through funding from the National Literacy Act served 4,687 students in fiscal year 1994-95. Of this number 2,727 were women, 3,992 were minorities, and 2,979 were limited English proficient speakers. An additional 341 students were served through the AFDC/JOBS and the JTPA programs. Of the participants in these programs, 2,991 were Spanish-speaking. These students are prime candidates for vocational bilingual training programs.

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THE LABOR MARKET NEED

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The American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries (AAJS), John W. Wright, Avon, 1991, estimates that Houston will be the fourth city in terms of the growth of its workforce...growing from 1,743,000 in 1985 to 2,700,000 by 2010. Moreover, according to Industry and Occupational Projections to the Year 2000, prepared by the Texas Employment Commission, secretaries and general office clerks will be second and third in terms of occupations adding new employees (respectively) in the state. From 1989 to 2000, these occupations are expected to add 83,100 employees to the workforce in Texas. (page 6 of the Economic Research and Analysis Department report referred to above).

Compared with 1989 figures the demand for secretaries will increase by 20.2% and general office clerks by 20.5%. Service occupations will increase by 34.7% nationwide, between 1990 and 2005 and administrative support occupations will increase by 13%, according to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, (pages 11 and 12). This would indicate that the demand for administrative support personnel is greater in Texas than it is on a nationwide basis. The annual figures for placement of new secretaries to take the place of separated employees (5,390) and accounting for annual growth (4,025) is 9,415. For general office clerks the total is 6,565 (3,525 growth and 3,040 separations, [page 25]).

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will rapidly expand business opportunities between Texan and Mexican companies. These opportunities will depend, in large part, on the ability of Texan firms to communicate effectively with Mexican clients and colleagues. The bilingual staff of the Texan businesses will be instrumental in providing the communications needed for the successful conclusion of Texan/Mexican business dealings.

Due to the above statistics concerning a projected increase in administrative support occupations in Texas and the need for trained English/Spanish speaking personnel to conduct bilingual business transactions , we will concentrate our efforts on developing a vocational bilingual training program for office specialists.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Following are the program objectives developed for the Vocational Bilingual Training Program.

1. To identify the skills required to perform the tasks and duties of the specific job featured in bilingual office administration positions.

2. To design and develop a performance-based functional context curriculum for a Bilingual Office Specialist Program.

3. To recruit limited-English proficient students into the Vocational Bilingual Office Specialist Program.

4. To develop intake and assessment procedures that are both appropriate and diagnostic rather than exclusionary.

5. To adapt vocational instruction so that students do not have to master English before learning a trade.

6. To provide counseling, support services, and job development that are geared to the special needs of limited-English proficient students.

7. To coordinate Objectives 1-6 so that each supports the other.

8. To evaluate and monitor the Vocational Bilingual Training Program.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment for bilingual office positions reflects the information needed to address the scope of skills required to produce program graduates whose skills meet market demands. These include background information about the company: type of business, size: local/state/national, privately owned or corporation, contact person; services the agency supplies to the candidate; skills requested by companies ; and rating the value of a range of skills to be taught in the proposed courses. Ten questions were developed to address information field 1-3, the rest of the survey addresses information field 4: the range of skills.

The skills for an entry level position in office employment were gathered by taking the minimum objectives of each of the existing OFAD credit courses which were to be replicated and adapted to the Bilingual Office Specialist program. Each agency then rated the performance objectives in terms of usefulness to the employer. The results of this needs assessment coupled with the data spreadsheet of job descriptions for bilingual office positions were used to create the course outline.

RECRUITMENT

The Project Coordinator visited campuses, sent letters to instructors requesting referrals, and made presentations to community based organizations. The recruitment of 32 students was done primarily through referrals from North Harris College teachers or community based organizations. Northwest Ministries referred students and arranged testing times for fifteen students. The referrals were made to give project personnel some indication of the students' work habits and ability and/or willingness to complete tasks. A small number of candidates were referred by students who could not participate, but passed on the information to friends.

As this is a pilot project, staff determined the need to see how a group of students with mixed abilities would do. Therefore, not only students whose academic English skills were high were considered for placement in the program, but also those who had previous secretarial experience and a high level of proficiency in their native language, or special needs.

ADVISORY BOARD

A very active Advisory Board was created, which is composed of representatives from local placement services, area businesses, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Since we wanted this group to be involved with the project in its various stages, we have assigned roles and responsibilities to each member. These include providing input and suggestions to facilitate interviews and data gathering for the task analysis; visiting at least one campus during the fall semester to orient the students to pilot course offerings for recruitment purposes; providing employment materials (tests, bilingual brochures, etc.) if relevant to project goals; informing project personnel of market trends within each board member's field or area which may impact training; making at least one presentation to the pilot group in helping them find employment in the bilingual office clerical field; and informing project personnel and board of resources for finding employment such as cooperative work programs.

INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

In order to determine language needs, participants take the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery in English and Spanish. This is a comprehensive set of individually administered tests for measuring abilities and achievement in oral language, reading, and written language. The battery also provides a procedure for evaluating the significance of strengths and weaknesses among an individual's oral language, reading, and written language abilities and compares Spanish to English language abilities. This battery provides information revealing which of the two languages is

stronger, or dominant as well as information regarding proficiency in each language compared to others at the same grade level.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Vocational Bilingual Training model includes four basic courses: Office Administration, Keyboarding, 10 Key Calculator Math, and Bilingual Business Writing. Each course contains 80 hours of instruction, 5 days per week, to allow students maximum time for practice and review. The courses have been developed according to the results of a needs assessment distributed to employment agencies, bilingual translation services and corporate human services personnel.

The project has developed written standards for program completion that reflect the ability of participants to perform bilingual tasks in an office setting. A generic system for linking functional context curriculum, incorporating Indicators of Program Quality and basic skills with the SCANS foundation skills and competencies has also been used.

All courses utilize computer aided instruction and the 10 key calculator course uses business calculators and computers for spreadsheet information. Software incorporating SCANS skills and competencies offer learners the opportunity to develop, practice, and apply skills necessary to obtain progress in entry-level jobs. Skills, therefore, are not taught in isolation, but in relation to their actual use. All activities are set in a work-related context, and students have to solve problems that require them to perform a cluster of skills to find the solutions. Innovative computer-simulation allows learners to explore a variety of career-paths. Interactive graphics and real-life situations bring the program to life-delivering high interest, motivation, and hands-on experience. Students will also be able to access the computerized PLATO Job Search Course to learn job-seeking skills, including rÇsumÇs, cover letters, application forms and job interviews, as well as the JOBS Lab, which offers computer-based pretests, lessons, and posttests for office administration.

Classes are taught in a self-paced learning center, with a combination of instructor directed lessons and student selected work. Much class time is devoted to individual and small group work, with assistance from the instructor. The program emphasizes skills that can help in life-long learning and be transferable to a variety of settings. Understanding the culture of the American workplace and the unique culture of the place of employment is essential to LEP employees' abilities to keep their jobs and be promoted at work. Cross-cultural and equity training is, therefore, provided throughout the program. Students will be assisted in finding jobs per cooperative agreements with the college. This cooperative work situation will give students an opportunity to experience a real work for pay environment in a sheltered situation for a period of twelve weeks following the completion of courses

EVALUATION PROCESS

A formative evaluation process is used to measure the extent to which the objectives and timelines are being met. Participant program evaluations will reflect their opinions about the service received. Selected staff members will also conduct informal interviews with participants to get additional feedback about whether the program is meeting their needs. The structured component of the formative evaluation will consist of monitoring and reporting the progress of each objective as measured through the successful completion of the specific tasks outlined in the work plan.

A summative evaluation will be conducted to assess the impact of the overall Vocational Bilingual Training Program:

1) overall student outcome measures; Learner outcomes will be evaluated using data obtained though pre and post-tests using standardized instruments; criterion-referenced tests developed for the course of instruction; record of observations by instructional and other staff members; self-report data gathered from learners in interviews and questionnaires; portfolio assessment. Assessments to provide data on how well instructional objectives are being met and competencies learned both in the training setting and in the workplace will include: trainee, supervisor and coworkers feedback;

conferencing and portfolio collection; competency checklists; simulations of job tasks and performance tests.

2) program outcome measures; A minimum of 70 percent of participants will be expected to complete one or more of the following program objectives: attain a Certificate in Bilingual OFAD; attain a Basic Skill Functional Level of (C) as determined by the CASAS; enroll in further educational courses; are placed in an unsubsidized job.

3) measures of efficiency of management; These will include: Student Evaluations of the Teaching-Learning Process; Classroom Observation; Feedback of Teachers' Performance. In addition, the Advisory Board will evaluate the Local Review Document for Implementation of Indicators of Program Quality in the areas of learner outcomes, program planning, recruitment, curriculum and instruction, support services, professional development, and retention.

DISSEMINATION

As a member of the Texas Workforce Education Consortium, North Harris College will share the following products with other colleges: The Curriculum (including SCANS foundation skills and competencies); Competency Checklists, and Lesson Plans; A Competency-Based Skills Evaluation Model, including Diagnostic Tests; and Cross-cultural Training in the Workplace Curriculum. The Consortium will likewise develop two World Wide Web pages to broaden dissemination of these products and to share research completed as a part of development efforts.

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